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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000378

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DEPT FOR AF/S; PRETORIA FOR DAO; GABORONE FOR RSO

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO ARMY COMMANDER: "WE HAVE FRUSTRATED THE COUP PLOTTERS"

REF: A) MASERU 367 AND PREVIOUS; B) MASERU 355

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a.i., EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Commander of the Lesotho Defence Forces (LDF) told diplomats on June 26 that security forces thwarted a coup attempt in mid-June which had been in the works since December 2006. He alleged the coup effort, which had the support of some active and former military personnel, was "linked to opposition parties who were not confident they could win at the ballot box (in February)." The Commander said that he believed the majority of LDF soldiers were loyal to military command and to the ruling government, adding that "no coup will succeed without the support of the military, and there is no such support." The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs subsequently registered "discomfort" over the diplomats' meeting with the LDF commander, expressing concerns that the media, whose "distortion of the news cost the GOL many seats" in the election, would get the "wrong perception" if observing the diplomatic corps meeting with Lesotho's military leaders. During a later press conference, the Minister of Communications denied allegations of internal factions within the LDF. It appears the GOL remains confused and frustrated by recent attacks and the potential involvement of military personnel. Despite outward appearances of normalcy, growing allegations of extrajudicial arrests and abuse and mistreatment of detainees (septel) suggest that the GOL is still grappling with perceived political and security threats. End Summary.

Calling on the General

¶2. (SBU) On June 26, at the request of the acting Dean of the diplomatic corps (Irish), resident Ambassadors and Chargis called on General Thuso Motanyane, Commander of the Lesotho Defence Forces (LDF). Diplomats agreed to participate in the unusual call due in part to renewed security concerns involving Lesotho military soldiers, including the shooting in Maseru on June 23 of a Ministry of Gender employee at an LDF checkpoint as well as sporadic gunfire at LDF guard posts in neighborhoods with a high concentration of diplomats and missions. Joining the A/Dean were the European Commission Ambassador, the South African High Commissioner, the new Libyan Ambassador (who has not yet presented credentials), the U.N. Resident Coordinator, and the U.S. and Chinese Charges. The LDF Deputy Commander, Chief of Staff for logistics, and Chief of Staff for operations (all Brigadiers General) accompanied General Motanyane.

¶3. (C) General Motanyane expressed surprise to see the entire diplomatic corps, saying he had been expecting only the A/Dean.

He nonetheless proceeded to give a robust briefing on recent attacks, Lesotho's week-long curfew, LDF operations in response to the attacks, and the conduct of LDF soldiers. Motanyane reiterated themes that other senior GOL officials (including the Deputy Prime Minister and the Commissioner of Police) have recently raised with diplomats (ref B), namely that security forces had in mid-June thwarted a coup attempt that involved active and former military personnel. Motanyane said these military personnel may not have acted as central planners, but "had certainly" aided and abetted efforts to overthrow the government. The coup planning, he said, had been underway since December 2006 and was "of course linked to opposition parties who were not confident they could win at the ballot box."

No Coup Can Succeed Without the Military

14. (C) General Motanyane said that following attacks on GOL ministerial residences, which involved the kidnapping and disarming of LDF soldiers, the LDF launched "intense operations" to find the perpetrators and reclaim seized weapons. On the basis of immediate suspicions of the involvement of military personnel, Motanyane said that the LDF had arrested one active major, who commanded troops involved in the post-attack operations, as well as several other unidentified retired officers and civilians - some of whom he stated "had attended rallies of the opposition ABC party." The General said he believes the LDF and police have identified and "frustrated" the coup ringleaders, and are close to providing the Attorney General with the basis for prosecutions on treason charges, but added that the arrested major and others were not the coup leaders, but rather "helped facilitate the perpetrators in obtaining and seizing officials weapons."

15. (C) Dismissing recent shooting incidents at the residence of the Minister of Gender as "nothing more than friendly fire," General Motanyane said the LDF's top priority was to confiscate weapons from those "who clearly have the intent to overthrow the government. If we don't get the weapons, the government and general population remain at risk." He opined that the perpetrators are "expert attackers who clearly have had military

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training." He said that he believed the majority of LDF soldiers were loyal to military command and to the ruling government, adding that "no coup will succeed without the support of the military, and there is no such support."

Reigning in the Dip Corps

16. (C) On June 27, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister in the PM 's Office Phooko, called in the Irish Ambassador to express GOL "discomfort" over the diplomats' meeting with the LDF commander. Phooko, joined by Minister of Communications Metsing, said the GOL preferred that the diplomatic corps use "regular structures" (i.e. the MFA) to communicate with the government. Phooko expressed concerns that the media, which he said the GOL blames for "distortion" and for costing the GOL "many seats" in the February election, would get the "wrong perception" if observing the diplomatic corps meeting with Lesotho military leaders. Of note, the Minister of Communications gave a press conference on June 28 at which he denied allegations of internal factions within the LDF. He acknowledged, however, that the recent attacks had "threatened the rule of law."

17. (C) Comment: On the basis of contradictory security assessments offered by various senior officials (publicly and privately), profound suspicions of the local media, consistent barbs and allegations directed at the political opposition, and a desire to control information to the local diplomatic community, it appears that the GOL remains confused and frustrated by recent attacks and the potential involvement of

military personnel. The GOL has publicly downplayed its concerns about disloyal troops, and there are no visible signs of immediate threats to the GOL's firm control and ability to function. The ongoing military and law enforcement sweep, however, that has resulted in growing allegations of extrajudicial arrests and abuse and mistreatment of detainees (septel), suggests that the GOL is still grappling with perceived political and security threats. End Comment.
MURPHY